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ABSTRACT

The field of education will have serious problems to face in the future. Adequate funding for schools and colleges will be a problem. A loss of public confidence in educational institutions has contributed to education's retreat from the public. Forces of change in society, reflected in the schools, makes effective goal setting for the present and the future difficult. Students are often not brought up to their potential prior to being sent out into society. These and other trends call for a reshaping of education, involving the triad of local function, state responsibility, and federal concern. These levels of government must cooperate and accept their responsibility if the status and quality of education are to improve. (CJ)

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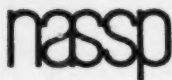
ISSUES FOR THE 1980's

Owen B. Kiernan

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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September 25, 1979

DWEN E. KIERNAN
Executive Director

Honorable Carl D. Perkins
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This past spring you were good enough to ask for input from both theoreticians and practitioners as the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education begins its needs assessment for the decade of the eighties. I respond now from a background of 45 years in American education. Assignments have included service as an elementary school principal, a junior-senior high school principal, a superintendent of schools, a university teacher, and for 12 years Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As you are aware, these past 11 years I have been privileged to be on the Washington scene serving as executive officer of the 36,000 member National Association of Secondary School Principals. These responsibilities have included numerous visits to schools and colleges in each of our 50 states. Similarly, observations have been made in all parts of the world--from Sydney to Moscow, Bangkok to Rome, and Calcutta to Stockholm. In each case visits with leaders here and abroad were supplemented by direct contacts with students, teachers, parents, and citizens from all walks of life. I mention this because far too frequently we tend to exclude from our deliberations those who serve daily outside the profession.

You and your colleagues on Capitol Hill are to be commended for seeking this input as we enter a new decade. It is critically important that our forecasts and planning steps be examined well in advance of any target dates. Frankly, intelligent planning for the future has been conspicuous by its absence in our profession and in many other local, state, and national endeavors. The result has been management by crisis. In the field of education one does not have to consult the tea leaves to know that there are serious problems to be faced in the months and years ahead.

Financing
Education

First and foremost is the question of adequate funding for our schools and colleges. With everything else in the 1980s the bill for education will be approaching astronomical levels. Yet, for those who think education is costly, the cost of ignorance staggers the imagination. Also, when the daily costs of schooling (less than \$10) are compared with per capita costs in hospitals, detention homes, and jails, our expenditures shrink to insignificance. On the question of revenue sources I testified before the House Ways and Means Committee in 1971 and suggested a more equitable formula with the states carrying two-thirds of the cost and the Federal Government one third. Although not received too enthusiastically by your colleagues at that time, I am pleased to note increasing national attention to this possibility. Without question

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confiscatory tax burdens must be lifted from the backs of local taxpayers.

In conjunction with the above issue the 96th Congress took a giant step forward in enacting PL 142 with its long-overdue mandate concerning handicapped children. The NASSP registered as a proponent in support of this far-reaching legislation and we continue to be enthusiastic about its implementation. Yet, funding imbalance during the 1980s will result in thousands of children and youth being short-changed. When support was given to PL 94-142 it was assumed that the fiscal pie would be substantially increased in size to underwrite these new services. Such has not been the case and youngsters we categorize as average or normal, in addition to the gifted, are going to be the forgotten young citizens of the new decade. With an ongoing tax revolt and increasing resistance to school budget requests, mandated services such as those incorporated in the new law for the handicapped will obviously be supported. We could well be facing a financial and academic disaster, however, in attempting to support general programs for the masses from limited or depleted budgets.

Public Confidence

The financial crunch mentioned above is not the only problem we will face in the eighties. Although it serves little purpose to catalogue all of our ills, several deserve attention as we plan for the new decade. Among these we must consider shrinking enrollments, violence and vandalism, student militancy, declining test scores, diplomas to functional illiterates, vocational incompetence, youth unemployment, alcoholism and drug abuse, strikes and threats of strikes, and others *ad nauseam*. Because of these one respected New York Times editor wrote that, "America is in headlong retreat from its commitment to education." Understandably, any such retreat is accompanied by a loss of public confidence. The educational establishment, of course, is not alone. A recently completed survey probed the public confidence quotient of the scientific community, medicine, religion, the military, business, TV and the press, our Congress, organized labor, the Federal Government including the Executive Branch, and several other institutions. The research involved the percent of respondents expressing "a great deal of confidence" in the people running various institutions. The time frame included the years 1973 through 1978. Education dropped to its lowest rating ever, from 49 to 28.4 percent. If it is of any solace only the scientific community and medicine rated slightly higher in the opinion of our citizenry. The others, even including the U. S. Supreme Court (28 percent), dropped substantially with the press at 20, Congress at 12.9, and labor bringing up the rear with 11 percent.

Admittedly with the loss of confidence in public institutions we have been notoriously inept in telling our side of the story. One distinguished British observer noted that we appear to conceal better than we explain. Perhaps we have forgotten that these are the public's schools, and for far too long public involvement has been minimal. Because of this unfortunate isolation and the

cacophonous symphony of the critics, a sharp confidence decline was inevitable. What we must do and do more effectively, is open our doors on a daily basis and get the public actively involved in the schools. One shot programs such as visitations during American Education Week simply will not do the job. While local newspapers are still considered an excellent source of information about the schools, in a recent Gallup poll 98 percent of the parents interviewed named *personal involvement* as a top priority.

Goals

The nation's schools, particularly its secondary schools, reflect more than most institutions do the forces of change in society. Thus the schools become modified with each passing decade by the flow of American life. The decade of the eighties will be no exception for these remarkably adaptable institutions. Perhaps the time is appropriate for a Congressional or Presidential Commission to reappraise our current and future goals. When goals are clear schools can be extraordinarily effective. In NASSP's bicentennial publication *Secondary Schools in A Changing Society/ This We Believe*, mention was made of the three million graduates who leave our schools each year. If the society demanded it we could produce three million welders, or three million trombonists, or three million French linguists. Goal setting, however, is an exceedingly difficult exercise. If the above commission recommendations are not feasible perhaps the new Intergovernmental Advisory Council on Education could be assigned this task. This assumes that Congress in its wisdom will enact the Department of Education Act of 1979 (S 210 and HR 2444) as recommended by the House-Senate Conference Committee. Whichever path is to be followed goal input must be obtained from leaders in all walks of life.

Curriculum Sprawl

Without wishing to second guess the outcomes of any and all commissions on goals for America's schools and colleges, a preliminary admonition may be appropriate. In 1918, following a lengthy study, *The Seven Cardinal Principles of Education*, were enunciated: Sound health knowledge and habits, command of the fundamental processes (the basics), worthy home membership, education for a vocation, education for good citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character. Our secondary schools in attempting to attain these goals were spread far too thin and tried to be all things to all people. Policing services, welfare, social responsibilities, health programs and literally dozens of others were dumped at the school house door. The typical course offerings rivaled Fibber McGee's closet--everything went in, nothing ever came out. We apparently forgot Whitehead's advice and counsel not to teach too many subjects (or take on too many societal responsibilities), but what we teach to teach thoroughly. The result has been described as curriculum sprawl with an accompanying decline in test scores. The return to basics in the eighties should be more than a slogan. But the basics must include far more than the three Rs. In a highly technological society students must be taught a basic appreciation and understanding of science, the humanities, modern foreign languages, social studies, and civic responsibility. Much has been written about

competency examination in these areas and to date approximately 75 percent of the states have mandated such exams. Testing, of course, is basic to determining levels of understanding and competency, as well as providing for remedial instruction when and where needed. With state after state rushing to mandate such examinations, however, the concept has been oversold. Parents have been led to believe that the simple provision for such testing is a guarantee that all youngsters will now achieve at extraordinarily high levels, or that all students will do everything well. This brings us back to the impossibility of the track coach having all four minute milers. What is important is that we diagnose achievement levels and needs and bring each student up to his or her potential prior to sending them out into society.

Reshaping Education

Our form of government stands or falls as the people succeed or fail in their responsibilities as citizens. From the earliest years of this great nation everyone has agreed that the only sound basis upon which to maintain an intelligent citizenry is through education. Originally, however, the parameters of education were fairly narrow, i.e., dealing only with young people of school age. Today we have new conditions and external forces beating on our system of education. Some have been well beyond the reach of the schools and recovery action appears to be stalled. Zero population, energy, and economic growth are phenomena unheard of until recent years. Even the thought that our schools and colleges will have fewer customers sounds un-American. After generations geared to growth and program expansion, shrinkage and retrenchment are foreign terms we find very difficult to accept. In the 1980s as world economics puts pressure on our productivity and social-service delivery systems a more efficient and cost effective technology must be developed. As one small example our school and collegiate systems must put microcomputers to much better use. Employment opportunities following graduation must also be provided for youth. The seven million unemployed youth in the western democracies mandates a solution in the coming decade.

Finally, on the question of reshaping American education I believe we must develop a multi-level structure similar to what Japan has done. In their reorganization there are schools for childhood, the adolescent years, higher education, and continuing education for all adults. With an aging population schools should no longer be regarded as single-purpose institutions for children and youth. That concept is now sociologically obsolete. We need schools for people - not just pupils. I would anticipate that the eighties will witness impressive growth in the education/community centers. Many school buildings no longer in use can be adapted for such programs and schedules established for the full day and evening throughout the week.

Who Does What

During the debate on the Department of Education Act of 1979, the opposition made frequent reference to the dangers of federalism.

Within months of the establishment of any such agency they predicted a federal take-over and the subsequent collapse of the state and local education agencies. Had they scrutinized the conference committee bill more carefully they would have seen the clear statement that the establishment of the Department *shall not increase federal control of education*. In fact the legislation specifically prohibits federal control. This does, however, suggest a review of the functions and responsibilities of the local, state and federal partners. In 1967 the ranking minority member of your committee inserted in the Congressional Record (June 12) my thoughts on the subject. Although twelve years have passed since that address at an Atlantic City convention I continue to stand by the conclusions reached. Although an obvious over-simplification, education continues to be a *local function*, a *State responsibility*, and a *Federal concern*. How well each partner is performing its role will be a subject of increasing debate in the eighties.

The State's Role

The *jurisdictional and leadership function* should remain with this partner. Admittedly, State Education Departments have not always been underwritten adequately with the result that they have not been regarded as influential instruments in the shaping of educational policy. Today we appear to have turned the corner and a ground swell of support can be found in a majority of the States. The several Departments are in a unique position to provide a type of educational leadership which, because of a variety of local conditions, schools and colleges cannot provide. Even with the strengthening of the Washington partner education is a state function and a state function it must remain.

The Local Role

The *operational function* should be found on this level. When breakthroughs have been made in establishing quality programs of education they have usually resulted from local initiative. A bureaucratic structure on the State and Federal levels customarily contributes to dead-center mediocrity. This does not mean that the State partner should not maintain minimum standards beneath which no community would be allowed to fall; or, should not exercise continuing leadership. The State cannot abdicate its responsibility for these any more than it can refuse to carry its share of the financial burden. Citizen involvement and grass roots support, however, must remain characteristics of local school districts even more so during the next decade.

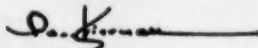
The Federal Role

A *supporting function* should be assigned to this partner, as the Federal Government can and must increase its contributions to education. With its broad tax base, it is in the most strategic position among the partners to highlight national needs and to eliminate local and state inequities. When world renowned bank robber Willie Sutton was asked by the prison psychiatrist why he robbed banks, he replied, "Because that's where the money is." By the same token, assistance

for our schools and colleges must come from where the money is-- at the Federal level. Unhampered by an overdependence on an obsolete property tax system, the Federal partner can raise monies in many ways and provide unlimited resources for the educational enterprise. There can be little question that our tax dollar "has gone to Washington," and a defensible portion of it must be returned to support education.

Time and space constraints militate against a more lengthy presentation of issues facing our schools and colleges. The Subcommittee's report for the decade of the seventies proved to be a significant contribution to both layman and professional alike. Under your leadership I am confident that the 1980 report will be similarly impressive. If I can be of further assistance as we enter the new decade I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me.

Yours very sincerely,



Executive Director

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